

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY  
INDONESIAN EFL BEGINNERS IN PERFORMING  
THEIR SPEAKING TASKS**



**SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION**

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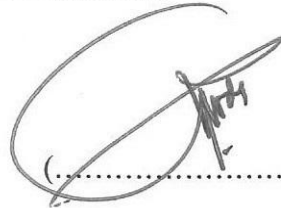
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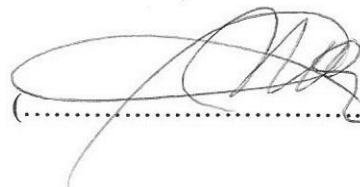
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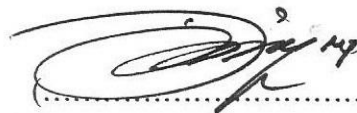
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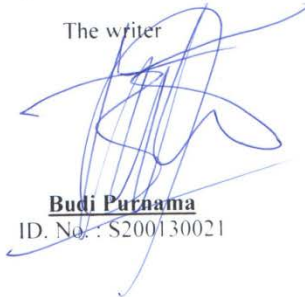
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Surakarta, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2017

The writer



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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY INDONESIAN EFL BEGINNERS IN PERFORMING THEIR SPEAKING TASKS

### **Abstract**

The case study aims at (1) obtaining empirical data on the types of communication strategies used by Indonesian EFL beginning learners, (2) figuring out the most and least frequently used communication strategies, and (3) identifying factors contributing to the use of communication strategies in respect to the second aim. Thirty two students participated in the initial part of this study, eight students of whom were selected to elicit responses related to their use of communication strategies. Then, descriptive qualitative research was employed to analyze the data excerpts and inferential statistical analysis to report on the frequency of communication strategies, to calculate each strategy in terms of percentage and presented in a tabular form. The results of data analysis revealed that the students employed 305 data excerpts registered into 13 types of communication strategies. One interesting finding was that almost a half of the whole data excerpts were dominated by the stalling strategies, namely "pause fillers" and "self-repetition" which ranked the first and the second respectively. In contrast, "foreignizing" was the least frequently used CSs. Their L2 insufficiency and practice inadequateness among the learners conceivably became factors contributing to the use of the former CS and their relatively high awareness on the L1 and L2 featured with a wide range of differences resulted in the infrequent use of the latter.

Key words: communication strategies (CS or CSs), English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, first language (L1), second language (L2).

### **Abstrak**

Studi kasus ini bertujuan untuk (1) mendapatkan data empiris mengenai jenis strategi komunikasi yang digunakan oleh pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing di Indonesia, (2) mencari strategi komunikasi yang paling banyak dan paling sering digunakan, dan (3) mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap penggunaan komunikasi Strategi sehubungan dengan tujuan kedua. Tiga puluh dua siswa berpartisipasi dalam bagian awal penelitian ini, delapan siswa di antaranya dipilih untuk memperoleh tanggapan terkait dengan penggunaan strategi komunikasi mereka. Kemudian, penelitian kualitatif deskriptif digunakan untuk menganalisis data dan analisis statistik inferensial untuk melaporkan frekuensi strategi komunikasi, untuk menghitung setiap strategi

dalam hal persentase dan disajikan dalam bentuk tabel. Hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahwa siswa yang dipekerjakan 305 data kutipan terdaftar ke dalam 13 jenis strategi komunikasi. Salah satu temuan menarik adalah bahwa hampir setengah dari keseluruhan data didominasi oleh strategi mengulur-ulur waktu, yaitu "pause fillers/pengisi jeda" dan "pengulangan-diri" yang masing-masing menempati peringkat pertama dan kedua. Ketidakmampuan dan kurangnya praktik di antara peserta didik menjadi faktor yang memberikan andil besar dalam penggunaan strategi ini. Sebaliknya, "foreignizing" adalah strategi komunikasi yang paling jarang digunakan sebab mereka sudah memiliki kesadaran yang relatif tinggi terhadap perbedaan yang cukup signifikan antara bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: strategi komunikasi, bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, bahasa pertama , bahasa kedua.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning of teaching a new topic section, that was about hobby, the researcher in this study as well as an EFL teacher was encouraged to ask his students randomly about their hobbies. Firstly, he felt relief when all students he asked could respond the question well. Some of them answered it using complete sentences along with grammatically correct sentences and some others responded it using complete sentences but with grammatically incorrect patterns and a few of them utilized short answers to respond the question. Surprisingly, the circumstance suddenly changed drastically when they were asked about a little bit deeper question following the previous question, asking the reasons why they were interested in those hobbies.

To this stage, the researcher strongly believed that the students all could understand the questions appropriately but they seemed to have got some problems in communicating his ideas into the target language. Some students answered it totally in English even though they had to employ some devices to help them to complete their conversations such as using *eee*, *I think*, *repeating prior words/phrases*, and *asking for a help* for the unknown L2 words. More surprisingly, there were several students who tried to express their reasons in English at first and then ended with their L1 languages at last. In an extreme way,

a few of them answered the question totally in their L1 language without bothering to translate them into the target language. According to Corder (1983), the ways the Indonesian learners to respond the questions above are called communication strategies (or henceforth CS or CSs).

What are CSs? According to Tarone (1981) cited in Fauziati (2010: 167), CSs can be viewed as attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second language learner and the linguistic knowledge of the target language interlocutor in a real communication. Generally, CSs can be defined as devices used to negotiate meaning (Tarone, 1980), to maintain the conversation (Long, 1981) or to handle difficulties or communication breakdown (Faerch & Kasper, 1983). Furthermore, Tarone et al (1984: 128) suggests that CS plays a very important role in the process of second language acquisition (or henceforth SLA). In a more detailed explanation, Ellis (1985: 6) clarifies that in the process of SLA, both L1 and L2 learners pass through sequences of development in which many of these developmental sequences are similar for L1 and L2 learners. Consequently, learners will transfer their L1 into the L2 since the L1 and L2 share a meaning but express it in different ways.

Regardless of the importance and definition of CSs, the interest in CSs has grown over the last four decades. In the 1970s, the study of CSs was introduced as a new area of applied linguistic research by four researchers: Selinker (1972), Savignon (1972), Varadi (1973), and Tarone (1977). Selinker (1972) published papers about interlanguage in which the notion of CSs in English L2 arose for the first time. Meanwhile, Savignon (1972) introduced pedagogical research focusing on student training in CSs. Varadi (1973, 1980) expanded on the ideas of Selinker (1972) by initiating a systematic analysis of CSs, and introducing several taxonomies and terms used in CS research (cited in in Chuanchaisit, S & Prapphal, K. (2009)). Those all showed that studies on CSs have achieved much success in western countries where English as regarded as a second language (ESL). To know how far studies on CSs have been implemented in those Asian countries where English is regarded as foreign language (EFL), the researcher in this recent study tried to collect such similar studies in the last five years as of the

beginning of 2015. When searching in the Internet, he found some research paper journals on CSs from China, Thailand, Iran, Taiwan, and Japan instead of Indonesia alone. It entailed that studies on CS in Indonesia were still inadequate if compared to our neighboring countries as mentioned above, mainly in China.

It is necessary to note that out of the existing journals, most research on CSs has focused almost exclusively on the strategies in isolation. A study on CSs in China by Mei and Nathalang (2010), for an example, investigated the most common CSs used by Chinese learners but they did not include *pause fillers* or *hesitation devices* strategies in that study. Whereas, Metcalfe & Ura's study in Thailand (2012) only focused on CSs categorized as *achievement strategies* used by Thai learners. Differing from the previous studies mentioned above, a study by Uztosun and Erten (2014), which investigated CSs used by Turkish EFL learners in the context of the ongoing interaction. For the first two former studies, the researchers might have equipped with sufficient prior studies on CSs in their countries so that they could compensate the gaps in such a way. In contrast, the latter study was most likely undertaken due to the limited availability of studies on CSs in their country.

However, as mentioned in the previous lines that studies on CSs in Indonesia context is still quite inadequate compared to those Asian EFL countries such as in Thailand, China, Iran, Japan, and Taiwan. In fact, Indonesian EFL learners have been found to employ IL CSs when they found the unknown L2 words. Hence, the researcher is interested in carrying out research on all types of CSs used by the Indonesian EFL learners on their actual or on-going condition. To analyze the data excerpts, the researcher adopts the clear and easy-to-understand taxonomy proposed by Dornyei (1995: 58). In the need of securing data reliability and validity, this study does not include the strategy of non-linguistic strategy such as using mime, gesture, facial expression, or sound imitation since the use of this strategy can be recorded and then transcribed. In particular, the study attempts to answer the following research questions.

- 1.1 What kinds of communication strategies are used by the students of State Junior high school 4 Surakarta?



- 1.2 What CSs are the most and least frequently used by the students?
- 1.3 What factors contribute the use of CSs in respect to the second research question?

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a case study, a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest”. The subjects of this research are four male and four female students sampled from the total population of 32 students who are in the class 8E of State Junior High School 4 Surakarta. In addition, each group classified into high and low English proficiency levels groups on the basis of their English final scores in their previous semester rapport. Whereas, the objects of this research are CSs used by the subjects in performing their speaking tasks.

### **2.1 Technique of Data Collection**

This research just employed one single technique in collecting data, namely documentation. The documents used in this research were the students’ transcripts of speaking tasks, namely interview and cartoon description. Both speaking tasks, oral interview and cartoon description were carried out when they were in their English class in a multi media room to avoid disturbance. They were asked to perform each task individually. For the oral interview task, each participant was required to respond to a set of the predetermined questions without restricting the time. When the oral interview task was completed, the cartoon description was conducted. This task took about more and less 3 minutes, depending upon their speaking ability. All speech was audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

### **2.2 Technique of Data Analysis**

In response to the first research question, the researcher reread the transcripts several times to identify to code and categorize CSs used by the subjects based on Dornyei's CSs typology and followed typological analysis suggested by Hatch (2002: 152) by dividing the overall data excerpts set into

categories or groups based on predetermined typologies. To report on the frequency of CSs, the researcher tallied behavior traits according to each strategy and calculated each strategy in terms of percentage and presented in a tabular form. In the long run, the researcher described each typology grouping according to the underlying theories and his common senses.

To answer the second research question, the researcher was directly able to determine what the most and least frequently used CSs were from the overall percentage of the CSs presented in the tabular form. With respect to the last research question, the researcher then investigated factors contributing to the use of the both CSs implicitly according to his own judgment on the collected data excerpts and possible related things such as general condition of English teaching in Indonesia and differences between the L1 and L2.

### 3. RESULTS

The first question in this study sought to determine the types of CSs employed by the students. The current study found that there were 13 types of CSs were registered from 305 data excerpts. The total 13 CS types were taken from 10 out of the 11 proposed CS types (*pause fillers/hesitation devices, approximation, code switching, literal translation, circumlocation, message abandonment, topic avoidance, appeal for help, use of all-purpose word, and foreignizing*) for the former) and 3 additional CS types (*self-repetition, self-repair, and clarification request*). In addition, this experiment did not detect any evidence for "word coinage"

The results of this study demonstrated that "*pause fillers and hesitation devices*" were the most frequently used CSs with 81 excerpts or as much as 26.56%. Although the students were able to use these strategies in their speaking tasks, they mostly used only one-word fillers and made many pauses in their utterances with the same pause fillers. Moreover, the researcher still found some of the students still made use of their L1 forms in using this strategy. It implied that they still employed interlanguage anyway.

It was then followed with "*self-repetition*" with the percentage of 15.41% or as many as 47 of 305 excerpts registered using this strategy. The students employed this second popular strategy in this study by repeating their previous words/phrases while gaining time to think for appropriate words or phrases to fill pauses in their communicating messages into the target language. It proved that the students were not only dependent highly on "*pause fillers*" to gain time to think what to say next.

The finding of this study also demonstrated that the students also used "*approximation*" frequently when performing their speaking tasks. There was 14,29% or as many as 42 excerpts registered as using "*approximation*". They were able to utilize both related terms and super ordinate terms to describe the target words mostly in English and a few number in Indonesian when they did not have the appropriate words to express their idea even though the findings also demonstrated that some students still used inappropriate words to show the closest meaning to the target words and might lead to misunderstanding and confusion for the listeners.

The researcher cannot deny the existence of "*code switching*", also well-known as language switching in this study. This strategy here ranked the fourth highest number with the percentage of 11.48 %, or as many as 35 of the total data excerpts. The students mostly developed "*code switching*" when they could not find the appropriate L2 words/phrases for their L1 target words/phrases and they finally came up with their L1 forms in their maintaining communication without bothering to translate them into the target language. In other words, the students used "*code switching*" when they lacked linguistic resources, mainly the L2 vocabularies instead of meaning structures.

The finding also discovered that there was 8,52%, equals 26 out of the total data excerpts registered as "*self-repair*". In using this strategy, the students corrected or changed their words when they realized their mistakes in their utterances lexically and semantically. More interestingly, "*self-repair*" in the subjects' performance were concerned with grammatical aspects such as

appropriate prepositions, appropriate pronouns, modifiers, appropriate target words and so on.

However, even though they have already repaired or corrected their mistakes, the researcher still found some errors in their correction/replacements and the others still used an inappropriate or insufficient messages to support their correction. It was then followed by "*literal translation*", which got the total number of 20, or equals 6.56%. The researcher listed that the mistakes the students did in employing this literal translation strategy were closely related with the use of idioms, adverbs of manners, prepositions, and adjectives such as angry from/about for angry with, very help for help very much, and in here for here. In this case, the students did not realize their mistakes when delivering their utterances since none of the students tried to use the other CSs.

In the meantime, "*all-purpose word*", "*circumlocution*" and "*topic avoidance*", were rationally employed once by the subjects in their overall utterances. This findings disclosed that the CSs became themselves "*less favorite*" for the students with the following elaborations. In the "*all-purpose word*" strategy setting, the results of data analysis listed there were 13 excerpts or as much as 4.26% using the strategy of "*all-purpose word*". It happened when the students tried to convey their utterances using words with multi-purpose meanings instead of specific terms to achieve the target meaning.

Although "*circumlocution*" is often seen as the most important achievement strategy by many researchers (e.g., Tarone, 1984; and Dornyei, 1995), the students in fact used this strategy less frequently in this study. There were only 11 excerpts, as much as 3.61%, registered as employing "*circumlocution*". In using this strategy, the students described the unknown words using their own short utterances and they frequently got difficulties in doing so. Therefore they developed the other CSs to convey her messages into the target meanings. Whiles, the total number of ""*topic avoidance*", " used by subjects was 11 or equals 3.61%. It occurred when the learners started expressing a target concept/idea and suddenly realized that they did not know how to go on. They then stopped in their mid utterance and chose another topic/idea to

continue their conversation. However, even though they had changed their target concept or idea, they also developed other CSs to finish their target meanings to the interlocutor when they encountered difficulties to continue their utterance.

In the meantime, "*clarification request*", "*appeal for help*", "*message abandonment*", and "*foreignizing*" collected 7 excerpts or as much as 2.30% for "*clarification request*", 6 excerpts as much as 1.97% for both "*appeal for help*" and "*message abandonment*". These outcomes disclosed that the students rarely employed these CSs, meaning that not all the students employed the three CSs even once at the average in their delivering their whole utterances. Furthermore, the least frequently used CS, "*foreignizing*", only collected 2 experts or as much as 0.66% out of 305 data excerpts.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The first problem statement in this study sought to determine types of CSs used by all the students. The results of data analysis showed that the students produced the overall use of CSs as many as 305 classified into 13 types of CSs, which consisted of 81 pause fillers or hesitation devices, 47 self-repetition, 42 approximation, 35 code switching, 26 self-repair, 20 literal translation, 13 use of all-purpose word, 11 circumlocution, 9 topic avoidance, 7 clarification request, 6 appeal for help, 6 message abandonment, and 2 foreignizing. It should be remembered that the 13 (thirteen) CS types were taken from 10 CS types of the 11 proposed CS types and 3 additional CS type, namely "*self-repetition*", "*self-repair*", and "*clarification request*", which are not found the proposed taxonomies proposed by Dornyei (1995).

One unanticipated finding was that out of the data excerpts, there was no single one registered as using "*word coinage*". This result may be explained by the fact that the Indonesian students has got relatively high English perception that the both languages have significant striking differences phonetically, morphologically, and semantically. Hence, they did not want to take risks using their L1 to replace the target words by creating new words. When facing such a

situation, they preferred using "*code switching*" directly to using "*word coinage*".

The most interesting finding was that out of the overall existing CS types, "pause fillers and hesitation devices" (26.56% ) were the most frequently CSs and "self-repetition" (15.41%) were the second most frequently used CSs among the 13 existing CSs. As a matter of fact, the both CSs above were used to gain time to think what to say next. Viewed from this standpoint, they both could be categorized as "stalling" or "time-gaining strategies". These outcomes uncovered that 41.97 % out of the total CSs use were employed to gain time. The former result further supports the idea of Uztosun & Erten (2014: 169:182) findings which showed that the three popular CSs mostly employed by Turkish EFL learners were 331 pause fillers, 207 self-repair, and 204 self-repetition respectively.

A possible explanation for this might be that both countries: Indonesia and Turkey were in the same index level as the countries with low proficiency index passed in 2012 by EF English but Indonesia was ranked at the 27th and Turkey the 32th out of 52 countries. It explicitly tells us that English education in both countries seem to have got some similarities in common. It should be remembered that the subject of this study was the students of junior high school while the subject used in the previous study by Uztosun & Erten (2014) in which the participants were university students at English Language Teaching Department (ELT) at a university in Turkey. This fact demonstrates that the strategic competence of the students' speaking in junior high schools in Indonesia was in the same level as the English university students in Turkey in terms of CSs use when performing English speaking tasks.

Another important finding was that the students still employed "*code switching*" than "*literal translation*" relatively high frequently. This result may be explained by the fact that the students' L1 seemed to have still contributed greatly on their efforts to compensate vocabulary deficiency to maintain their conversation with their interlocutor. Viewed from SLA standpoint, what the students did was very natural as Ellis (1985: 6) confirmed that in the process of

language acquisition, both L1 and L2 learners passed through sequences of development. Many of these developmental sequences were similar for L1 and L2 learners. Consequently, an error was likely to arise in the L2 because learners will transfer their L1 into the L2 since the L1 and L2 share a meaning but express it in different ways. The possible explanation why they produced "code switching" (35) more frequently than "literal translation" (20) was that they found unknown L2 words more than structure meanings besides of the fact that "*code switching*" was more practical than "*literal translation*" in the usage.

With respect to the second research question, "*What CSs are most and least frequently used by the students?*", the finding revealed as elaborated in the previous lines that "*pause fillers*" was the most frequently used CSs (26.56%) as they tended to be overused by the students to strategies to gain time to think what to say next. In contrast, "*foreignizing*", appeared to be the least frequently used CS (0.66%). There are several possible explanations for these outcomes which will be discussed in the following paragraphs as the answers of the last research question.

The last question in this research was "*What factors contribute the use of CSs in respect to the second research problem?*" Since the study did not explicitly investigate factors contributing to the use of CS, Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that there are two possible explanations for this result. The primary factor contributing to the dominant use of pause filler is that Indonesian learners lack of L2 resources so that they cannot express their complete ideas into the target language directly and fluently. Some could compensate them by paraphrasing, using an alternative term to express the meaning of the target lexical item, circumlocution, describing them. In contrast, they employed message abandonment, topic avoidance, and code switching for the unknown L2 words/ideas.

Another possible explanation for these results may be the lack of adequate practicing inside of outside of schools which directly and indirectly influence their affective condition such as feeling anxious, unconfident, shy, and incapable. As a result, they forget some target words temporarily when they have to use them at

once. To overcome this deficit, they should take more time to recall the missing words/concepts and take up them into the target phonetic forms before expressing them into the target language. In this time span, they employed this CS to fill break in proceedings.

With respect to the least frequently used CS, *foreignizing*, the outcome clearly revealed that this CS was hardly used by the students. It implied that they have got relatively high self-awareness on English. Realizing that the two languages have featured with striking differences in pronunciation, semantic, and syntactical ways, they preferred using "*code switching*" to "*foreignizing*". The overall use of "*code switching*" (35) has proven the students' determination not to use "*foreignizing*" (only 2) when encountering the unknown L2 words.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to identify the types of CSs used by the Indonesian EFL students. The results of study this study revealed that almost a half of the whole data excerpts were dominated by the stalling strategies, namely "*pause fillers*" and "*self-repetition*" which ranked the first and the second respectively. In contrast, "*foreignizing*" was the least frequently used CSs. The possible factors contributing to the use of the former CS were due to their L2 insufficiency and practice inadequateness among the learners. Whereas, the latter one was conceivably resulted from their relatively high awareness on the L1 and L2 featured with a wide range of differences semantically, phonetically, and lexically. Hence, they tended to avoid employing this CS in their utterances.

The findings in the present study bring about pedagogical implications and for EFL learners and teachers as follows:

First, it is useful for EFL students to be introduced with these CSs as fundamental strategies to develop their strategic competence. To start with, some basic and easy strategies such as pause fillers and hesitation devices, approximation or self-repair may be taught to the students. Then, they may be introduced more advanced strategies such as circumlocution, confirmation check,



topic avoidance, and so forth. However, the researchers may make an adjustment based on their actual context and situations.

Second, once EFL teachers become aware of the CSs used by their students, they will be able to detect the use of ineffective strategies and teach them more effective ones to increase their ability in speaking and consequently their learners' motivation to be better speakers of the target language.

Lastly, the number of studies on CSs in Indonesia is still inadequate and unsystematic. Hence, the need for further research into this area is obvious.

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